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Review and appraisal of the system-wide implementation of the Council's agreed conclusions 1997/2 mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system

Statement submitted by the Association for Democratic Initiatives, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* E/2004/100 and Corr.1 and Corr.2.

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The Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI), an NGO located in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that has been in consultative status with ECOSOC since 2003, and that was elected Sub-regional Coordinator of the UN-NGO Informal Regional Network (UN-NGO-IRENE) of Eastern Europe, developed a pilot project on "Establishment of institutional mechanisms for gender equality at local level", based on the specific needs of local municipalities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The purpose of the project was to establish in each locality a public council on gender equality and to create a pilot model of gender equality structures at local level. This also has to establish a permanent contact between three municipalities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and municipalities in Bulgaria and to institutionalize cooperation between local authorities, Members of Parliament (MPs) and NGOs in order to develop gender sensitiveness among representatives of both municipalities and women NGOs.

The public councils were established in each municipality included in the project:

- Municipality of Kisela Voda
- Municipality of Gostivar
- Municipality of Vrutok

The lack of reliable disaggregated data was a problem in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in all areas and the project focused first of all on gathering grass-root information and undertaking the necessary research on gender issues to illustrate the needs of women in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the problems they face in order to be able to carry out constructive work in this area. The Association for Democratic Initiatives has conducted one of the first sociological researches on gender issues aiming to identify the prime activities and strategic measures for improving the status and rights of women in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia according to the legislation in place.

Before the research started, ADI organized meetings in each municipality with the mayors and other representatives from the municipalities, local NGOs, representatives of the local structures of the political parties, local media and active representatives of the civil society. The main topic of these meetings was to introduce the project, to share ideas how to work together and to propose suggestions or opinions about gender equality, employment, social and economic rights, legislation on gender equality and other crucial women issues other leaders of the abovementioned municipalities in order to get their support. Aiming to have a surveying process which won't meet obstacles, their assistance was offered by contacting leaders of different institutions embraced in each municipality.

The mayors of the municipalities proposed the following institutions where the research was conducted:

- In the municipality of Gostivar: The Municipality, the Ministry of Finances, the Basic Court – Gostivar, P.E. "Komunalec" and the Primary School "Goce Delcev";
- In the municipality of Vrutok: The factory "Dekon", the Factory of glass, P.E. "Barok", the Primary School "Zlate Damjanoski" in the village of Vrutok and Raven, P/E. "Korab mermer";
- In the municipality of Kisela Voda the survey to be conducted in all ministries included in this municipality and the factory "USJE CEMENTARA" – Kisela Voda.

The results of the research on the opinion of men and women on women representation in public institutions and the political life in the three selected municipalities were analysed. The report was prepared, printed and disseminated overall municipalities, government institutions, NGOs, to the society. A number of reports have been requested by the citizen information centres within municipalities. Also the research has been presented and overseas by ADI staff Mr. Albert Musliu and Lindita Bexheti as well as by the mayors Mr. Bajram Hajrullai and Mr. Xhemail Rexhepi. It was gratefully acknowledged and supported by all public councils established in each municipality in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Vrutok, Gostivar, and Kisela Voda) and individuals.

The first cross meeting was organized in Sofia, Bulgaria and the second cross meeting thanks to the strong cooperation with the mayors, Members of Parliament (MPs), NGOs, was organized in Gostivar in the big hall of Gostivar municipality. In this Meeting were considered the number of participants and the local authorities from Bulgaria, and journalists from the national newspapers and local media covered this event. The report together with a copy of the newspapers and video tape from the local media was disseminated to the partners in Bulgaria, to the donors of the project and to the members of the public councils in the three municipalities.

One of the main activities of the project was the organization of two roundtables in each one of the three selected municipalities in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Vrutok, Gostivar, Kisela Voda) characterized with ethnic diversity.

So ADI organized 6 roundtables with the participation of representatives form different structures of the public council (local authorities), MPs elected in the respective location, representatives of NGOs and also journalists from the local electronic and written media.

Besides the roundtables, the Association for Democratic Initiatives is organizing awareness meetings every month in its premises focusing on success stories on working together to change the gender balance in public institutions and political life and to establish institutional mechanisms for gender equality at local level.

This enhanced the work of the representatives of local authorities and NGOs working with women and on behalf of women, and built the capacity of the NGOs that participated in the

roundtables and project meetings. It is hoped that the involvement of these NGOs in the project activities will further improve networking and co-operative work.

These activities reinforced the relationship between the municipalities and the communities they represent, the NGO sector and the media. It is anticipated that the project will not only result in important new legislation and institutional mechanisms, but will also make the local government institutions more transparent and gender awareness.

This innovative approach was successfully implemented by ADI and helped filling the lack of legal protection for women's rights.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - a country that recently declared its readiness to start the negotiation process for Associative Membership with European Union. It is therefore of vital importance that it starts to look at its legislation in terms of gender issues, and that it becomes more gender aware and actively supportive of gender equality at all levels. Aware that the level of democracy is assessed through the position of women in it, in the future in order to advance the positive processes of equal participation of women in the social developments and to enhance the role of women at all levels (local, national, regional and international).

A wide of variety of actions including almost all of the methods available for campaign were engaged to raise the participation of women in public institutions and political life in order to empower women to go beyond the dominant political lack of interest. In this context, the role of non-governmental organizations should be fostering women's active participation in political activities with promoting the role of women in the democratic society to reaffirm its commitment to promoting positive actions for overcoming traditional stereotypes in respect of women.

The project succeeded to support and to empower women through the following main indicators:

- Their apparent interest to ADI activities
- Their interaction with ADI project staff
- Their involvement in focus groups and meetings
- Their raised awareness from campaign materials.

It is worth mentioning that as a result of the continuous efforts of ADI and other NGOs in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the efforts of many dedicated public figures and politicians as well as those of the Women's Lobby, on 26 May 2004, the Parliament of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia adopted the "Law on the Changes of the Law for Local Elections", (official gazette 35/2004). The article 18 of this Law envisages that in the forthcoming Local Elections, "30 % of the proposed city councillors should be from different gender, both in the upper and bottom part of the election lists". With this new law, a minimum of 30 % of members of the new City Councils will be women. This is not the

end of the efforts to ensure the gender balance in the local government, but it is indeed a good start and a strong motivation for ADI future work in this field.

It is predicted that such achievements will encourage women to participate in a wider extent in the democratic processes and ensure that all their rights are respected.